

# FORUM

## The Power of Prayer



**Ernie Pitt**

**This & That**

Last month, I wrote this column on the reappointment of my pastor Donald Jenkins. He had been reassigned to Lake Norman and promoted to district superintendent. Great, you might think. However, Pastor Jenkins didn't want the job and most of the members of St. Paul United Methodist Church didn't want him to leave.

During the tumultuous weeks that followed, the congregation prayed that the bishop, who makes the appointments, would reconsider his decision. We were told that the bishop never changes his mind. Naturally, we felt somewhat disenfranchised since all of the UMC indicators pointed to tremendous success at St. Paul. Things such as increased membership when most UMC are declining; paying all apportionments on time and in



Supporters of Rev. Jenkins gather outside the church.

full; outreach programs; and bringing many souls to Christ characterized the last decade at the church under Jenkins' leadership.

We really felt that Pastor Jenkins and the St. Paul congregation had set examples for how a Methodist church could turn all the negatives around. We felt that the most

important issue facing not only us but the body of the UMC was bringing souls to Christ. Our membership reflects steady growth and greater commitment from congregants.

So, we prayed that God would not harden the hearts of those responsible for making the decision. I am pleased to

report that last Sunday shortly after the 11 a.m. service, we were notified that Pastor Jenkins would not be moved. Oh, what a mighty God we serve was the chant heard throughout the sanctuary.

This change was not considered a victory by the congregation, merely God's answer to our prayers. It is also a testament to the faith that the bishop has in Pastor Jenkins. I believe the bishop saw first hand the fervent faith that our pastor has instilled in his flock. It also demonstrates the spiritual maturity of both St. Paul and the body of the UMC. The celebration was not one of victory, rather it was one of hope in the sense that we believe that during the UMC conference that is going on as you read this piece, change will overcome inertia and all of the churches of the United Methodist faith will benefit from the St. Paul Experience.

Prayer really does changes things. Amen? Amen!

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## The Drop-Out Crisis



**Marc Morial**

**Guest Columnist**

*"Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough."*

— Mary McLeod Bethune

I participated in a conference organized by General Colin Powell in Washington, D.C. earlier this month and learned that every 26 seconds, one American high school student drops out of school — that's over 3,000 youth per day; nearly 10,000 youth each month; or 1.1 million young people a year. And unfortunately, the crisis has hit minority communities particularly hard.

Today, in the nation's 50 largest cities, only 52 percent of public high school students graduate, compared with a national average of 70 percent. Even more startling is the disparity in graduation rates between many urban areas and their more affluent suburbs. In New York, the graduation rate is 47.4 percent for the city and 82.9 percent for the suburbs. In Philadelphia, the split is 49.2 vs. 82.4 percent and in Los Angeles, it is 57.1 vs. 77.9 percent.

The fact is almost half of African-American and Latino teens do not graduate on time. High school drop-outs are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty and wind up in prison. Because the financial implications of dropping out of high school are directly related to a person's level of education, the financial stability of black families, black communities and the nation at



large are impacted by the African American high school drop out rate.

Effects of high school drop out rates on the global economy are just as devastating. At a time when Asian giants like China and India are winning the competition for technology and jobs, America simply can't afford to leave millions of largely black and brown young diamonds languishing in the rough. We are literally throwing away our future. Also, it is estimated that if the graduation rates for minority and White students actually reached parity by 2020, the potential increase in income across the nation would add more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy.

The current drop out rate is a crisis, more vital to our future than the war in Iraq or

the current economic recession. It's time we treated it as such. We have both a national and a moral obligation to make sure that all of our children get the education they need to succeed. I'm not talking about throwing money at the problem — I'm talking about investing in human capital. I'm talking about making certain that all black children have access to a quality education. And, research has shown that the achievement gap between white and minority students is due in large part to inequities in income and funding. We must provide adequate resources, not only for public education, but for health programs and mentoring and after-school programs so our children are given every opportunity to graduate, go on to college and make a good living.

The great American educator, Mary McLeod Bethune once said she would never rest while "there is a single [African American] boy or girl without a chance to prove his worth." And, in 1954, when the Supreme Court ended school segregation in the landmark Brown v Board of Education case, there was the exuberant hope that a quality education would at last be the guarantee for every child in America.

But 54 years after Brown, we seem to be falling further behind. It's time we — American citizens, the Bush Administration, local and state governments and all presidential candidates — do something about it.

Marc Morial is President and CEO of the National Urban League.

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The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc. The Chronicle is a proud member of:

National Newspapers Publishers Association • North Carolina Press Association • North Carolina Black Publishers Association • Inland Press Association